

Elizabeth MacKinlay, *Spiritual Growth
and Care in the Fourth Age of Life.*
Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers,
2006. Pp. 272, \$29.36.

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Professor Elizabeth MacKinlay has excellent credentials for examining the subject of this book: the spiritual growth that is possible with the right care in the last stages of life. She is a professor of theology and the director of the Center for Aging and Pastoral Studies in the School of Theology of Charles Sturt University, Canberra, Australia. Her research in the field of aging is highly respected.

Whether you are looking for a textbook for a course in this field or for overall guidance in providing spiritual support for older adults in institutional care, you can do no better than to consult Elizabeth MacKinlay's engaging book. She has done a thorough job of outlining the important aspects of care that one must consider

when addressing the spiritual needs of adults in what MacKinlay calls the "fourth age of life," a time of frailty and vulnerability for seniors who are dependent on others for care. Her holistic approach offers a solid overview of the frail elderly and where they are in their journey through life. She focuses particularly on their spiritual development and how best to meet their myriad spiritual needs, including the need to be heard and validated as a whole person with a rich story to tell.

MacKinlay asserts that the frail elderly are actively engaged in a "renewed search for life-meaning" (67) in spite of their infirmities and numerous losses. She bases this assertion on her years of research and experience as an Anglican priest and academic in the area of gerontology in Australia. She makes an important distinction between the spiritual needs of older adults who require ongoing institutional care (referred to as "aged care") and of those who live independently. She dedicates chapters to such important topics as the assessment of spiritual needs, the role of reminiscence in meaning-making, how to support older adults with mental health concerns, how best to care for those with dementia, how to provide end-of-life care, and what ethical concerns may need to be addressed.

MacKinlay does an excellent job of summarizing research relevant to these topics and also draws on her own research and experience to make explicit her well-reasoned approach to caring for the frail elderly. Each chapter features a helpful introduction, conclusion, and summary, which makes for smooth reading and ensures that no key pieces of information are missed. MacKinlay also includes numerous case studies and quotes the research subjects verbatim to paint a more complete picture. She writes clearly and passionately about "best practices" relating to the care of the

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frail elderly and provides practical suggestions about how best to proceed in different cases.

Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age of Life is appropriate for professors teaching courses in this or related fields, for new spiritual care providers just getting started in the field of chaplaincy, and for seasoned spiritual care professionals seeking a guidebook that integrates current theory and practice. In the latter case, the book is quite valuable in providing new directions in spiritual care for this age group. In fact, this book offers anyone with an interest in spiritual care a solid academic foundation in this topic, as well as an increased confidence in meeting the spiritual needs of the frail elderly. I highly recommend this must-read for academics, professionals, and anyone who shares MacKinlay's passion for providing care to those "in the fourth age of life."